

Reading Jewish Columnar Death Records in Russian

“How to” Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

January 2023

GOAL

This guide will teach you how to extract information from Jewish death records.

INTRODUCTION

Jews in the Russian Empire were required to keep records of birth, marriage, and death beginning in 1835. These records were often recorded in both Russian (left-side of document) and in Hebrew/Yiddish (right-side of document). Although both sides of the document typically contain the same information, it's always a good idea to translate both sides, as there may be more information in one side as compared to the other. This “How to” Guide will address the side of the document recorded in Russian. In order to most effectively use this guide, you should be familiar with old Russian handwriting. If you are not, you may want to consult the following “How to” Guides before continuing:

- [The Russian Alphabet](#)
- [Deciphering the Handwriting and Understanding the Grammar](#)

HOW TO

Jewish vital records, or metrical books (метрические книги), for a particular location are typically organized by year, and then in four sections by record type (in some cases it may be organized first by record type and then year). Death records are found in the fourth section, and usually have a title page at the beginning of the section as seen in the examples below.





In some cases, the name of the shtetl, or Jewish town, was handwritten on the cover page. The title page may also contain Hebrew or Yiddish.

Jewish columnar death records span two pages as shown in the example below. The information on the left-hand side of the page was typically recorded in Russian, while the information on the right-hand side of the page was recorded in Hebrew (in some cases the page sides may be switched). This guide will address only the portions of the document recorded in Russian. Although both the Hebrew and Russian versions should contain the same information, there may be more details in one language versus the other. It's a good idea to read both sides of the document.

ЧАСТЬ IV-я — О УМЕРШИХЪ.						חלק רביעי מן סתים					
№	Гдѣ умеръ и погребенъ.	Число явившагося.	Болезнь или отъ чего умеръ.	Кто умеръ.		ספר	באות עיר	חודש ויום המיתת	גיל	מנה מות טהור או מסיבה אחרת	מי מן ומה שמו ומעשרה או מה שמה ומה ויתנה בתולה או נשואת אלמנה או גרושה
Женщины.	Мужчины.	Христиан-скихъ.	Еврейскихъ.	Дата.		Стор. Женщин.	Стор. Мужчин.	Ив.	Ив.		
208	Володино	4	10	61	Старческая	Трашкова, в. Соро-Лина, жена Барка Котлера		4	10	61	טראשקאוו, ב. סורא-לינא, זשנא בארקא קאטלער
209	"	"	"	70	Котлеръ Кисля	Мейшаслевъ и Мира Шт-милевна, жена Вазера Соловьевна		"	70		מיישאסלעוו, מירא שט-מילעוונא, זשנא וזערא סאלוביעוונא

Image from: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9GQ-XDHS?cat=1058308>

COLUMN HEADING TRANSLATIONS

See below for a translation of column headings in a Jewish death record.

1. No.		3. Date and month of death	4. Age		
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a. Female	b. Male	2. Place of death and burial	a. Christian calendar	b. Hebrew calendar		5. Cause of death	6. Name of the deceased
Женского.	Мужского.	Гдѣ умеръ и погребенъ.	Христианскій.	Еврейскій.	Мѣта.	Болезнь или отъ чего умеръ.	Кто умеръ.
208		Вильно	4	10	61	Старческой слабости	Трабскаѣ м. Сора-Хана, жена Берка Котлера

Image from: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9GQ-XDHS?cat=1058308>

1. ENTRY NUMBER: The entry number is split into two columns: 1a – female, and 1b – male. The number in this column means that the individual was the xth female or male who died that year.

2. PLACE OF DEATH AND BURIAL: This column contains the place of death and burial. The death and burial place are often the same. Keep in mind that the place name may be recorded once at the top of the page and then dittoed (“”) down for all entries on that page. For help deciphering locations, transliterate the town name and use the [JewishGen Communities Database](#) to help you determine the location.

Some entries may simply list the name of the death/burial location, while others might include the phrase “died in” or “buried in.” See below for handwritten examples.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
he died in	умер(ъ) в(ъ)	Умеръ въ
she died in	умерла в(ъ)	Умерла въ
he was buried in	погребен(ъ) в(ъ)	въ погребенъ въ

she was buried in	погребена в(ъ)	<i>погребена въ</i>

3. DATE: The date column is divided into two sub columns – column 3a containing the date of the death according to the Christian calendar and column 3b containing the date according to the Hebrew calendar. In some cases, the month is only written at the top of the page, or even just once at the beginning of the month. You may need to scan the surrounding entries and/or pages to find the death month. The examples below show the months of the Christian and Hebrew calendars in genitive case, which is most common in these records; however, you may find the months with different grammatical case endings, or even in an abbreviated form.

In some cases, the burial date is also included. The word for burial is found below.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
buried	погребен(ъ)	<i>погребенъ</i>

Christian Calendar Months

Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)	Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)
January <i>января</i>	<i>Января</i>	July <i>июля</i>	<i>Июля</i>
February <i>февраля</i>	<i>Февраля</i>	August <i>августа</i>	<i>Августа</i>
March <i>марта</i>	<i>Марта</i>	September <i>сентября</i>	<i>Сентября</i>
April <i>апреля</i>	<i>Апреля</i>	October <i>октября</i>	<i>Октября</i>
May <i>мая</i>	<i>Мая</i>	November <i>ноября</i>	<i>Ноября</i>
June <i>июня</i>	<i>Июня</i>	December <i>декабря</i>	<i>Декабря</i>

Hebrew Calendar Months and When they Usually Fall

Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)	Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)
Shevat (Jan-Feb)	<i>Швата</i>	Av (Jul-Aug)	<i>Ув ава</i>
Adar (Feb-Mar)	<i>Удара Адора</i>	Elul (Aug-Sept)	<i>Элура</i>
Nisan (Mar-Apr)	<i>Нисона</i>	Tishrei (Sep-Oct)	<i>Тышрей</i>
Iyyar (Apr-May)	<i>Ира Ийра</i>	Heshvan (Oct-Nov)	<i>Хешвана</i>
Sivan (May-Jun)	<i>Сивона</i>	Kislev (Nov-Dec)	<i>Кислева</i>
Tammuz (Jun-Jul)	<i>Таммуза</i>	Tevet (Dec-Jan)	<i>Тейвеса</i>

4. AGE: The age of the individual was recorded here. It is most often recorded using numerals. Generally, numbers in this column imply years, but in some cases, months, weeks, or even days (often in the case of deceased children) were recorded. See below for handwritten examples and common abbreviations.

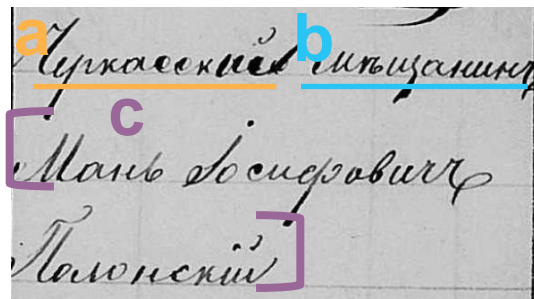
English	Russian	Handwritten Example
years	года г.	<i>2.</i>
years	лет л.	<i>21.</i>
months	месяцев мц. м.	<i>21 м.</i>
weeks	нед.	<i>нед.</i>
days	дней дн.	<i>дн.</i>

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5. CAUSE OF DEATH: This column contains the cause of death. Because there are so many various causes of death, and far too many to list here, see the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#) or a good dictionary to help you determine causes of death. Note that many entries include the word от(ъ) which means *of* or *from*. Causes of death following от(ъ) will be in genitive case. Genitive case endings will differ slightly from what appears in dictionaries or the word list.

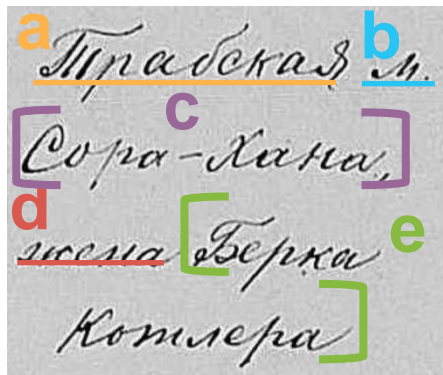
6. NAME OF THE DECEASED

The last column contains the name of the deceased person. In addition, a person's social estate/standing, and registration place (which may be different from the actual place of residence) was also recorded. If the individual was a child or woman, a father or husband was also listed as well. Information and the order in which it was recorded in this column can vary greatly. Below are a few examples that are general representations of death record format, but keep in mind this column can look very different from record to record.



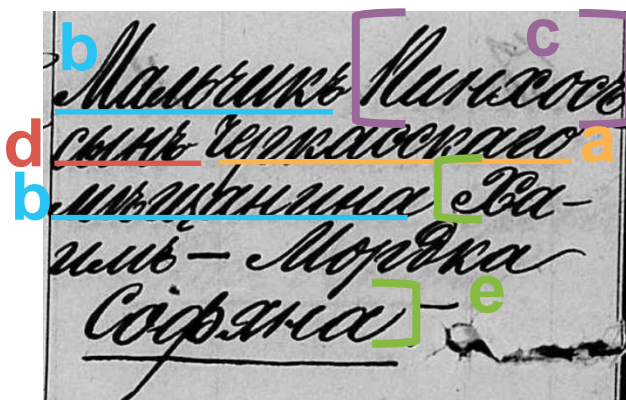
Translation and Record Outline

[location/place of registration]^a [social estate]^b
[deceased person's name]^c



Translation and Record Outline

[location/place of registration]^a [social estate]^b [deceased person's name]^c relationship identifier^d [relative of deceased person (name in genitive case)]^e



Translation and Record Outline

[descriptor]^b [deceased person's name]^c
relationship identifier^d [location/place of registration]^a [social estate]^b [relative of deceased person] (name in genitive case)]^e

a. Location: The paragraph typically begins with the residence (or place of registration) of the

family. Keep in mind that an individual may be registered in a particular town but does not actually reside in that town. In some cases, the location may be in adjectival form (for example with a -овский or -янский ending), as shown in the example below. Remove the adjectival ending and use the [JewishGen Communities Database](#) to help you find the original shtetl name.

Жидыковскій → Жидыковскій → Жидыки
 Жидыки = Zhidyki = Židikai, Lithuania

If the town was located outside the district the record was recorded in, the district they were from (often in genitive case) may be listed, as shown in the example below.

*Бѣльскаго уѣзда
 Немировскій* Бѣльскаго уѣзда
 Немировскій
 Bielsk Uyezd (district)
 Nemirov (Niemirow, Poland)

b. Social Estate and other Descriptors: In the Russian Empire, each person had a certain place in society, known as their social estate or *soslovie*. They were often recorded in metrical books. The most common estate listed in records can be seen below. See the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#) for other variations. Keep in mind an occupation may be listed instead of a social estate. Again, see the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#) for help.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Town Dweller/ Petty bourgeois	Мѣщан(ъ)/ Мѣщанин(ъ) м. (abbreviation)	<i>мѣщанин</i>

If the individual that died was a child or woman, an additional descriptor may be used to describe the woman or child. See below for handwritten examples. Refer to the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#) for other vocabulary encountered.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Boy child	Ребенок(ъ)	<i>Ребенокъ</i>
Girl child	Ребенка	<i>Ребенка</i>
Boy child	Младенец(ъ)	<i>Младенецъ</i>

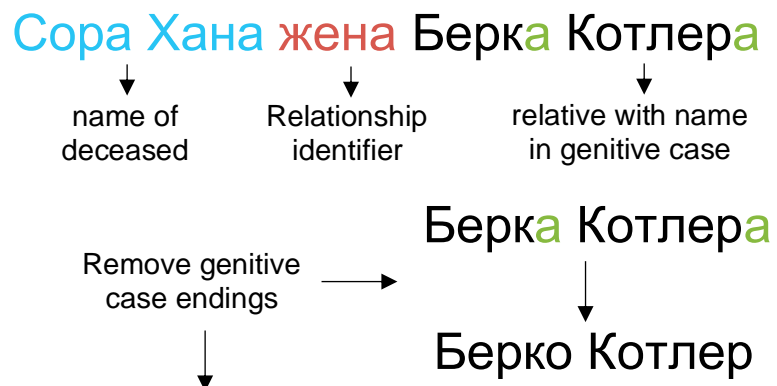
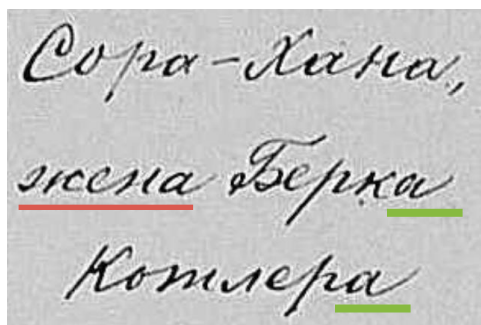
Girl child, or unmarried woman	Дѣвица	Дѣвица
Woman	женщина	женщина

c. Name of the deceased individual: In some cases, just the given name of the deceased person was listed. In such a case, you may be able to determine the patronymic (middle name derived from the given name of the person's father) and surname from the individual the person was related to. Some handwritten examples of common Jewish names can be found at the end of this "How to" Guide.

d. Relationship Identifiers: If the individual was a child or woman, a father or husband was also listed as well. The following relationship identifiers are commonly found in death records. See the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#) for additional vocabulary you might encounter.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Widow	вдова	Вдова
Son	сын(ъ)	Сын
Daughter	дочь	Дочь
Wife	жена	Жена

e. Relative of Deceased Person: The most common relatives of deceased persons found in records are a father of a child or unmarried woman or the husband/widow of a woman. Note that the name of the relative of a deceased person will be in genitive case, implying that they belong to the deceased person (ie. *son of x*). You will need to remove the genitive case endings before adding these individuals to the tree as shown in the example and grammar table below. Note that many surnames have an adjectival case ending (for example, names ending in -ski).



Sora Chana wife of Berko Kotler

	Nominative	Genitive
Masculine (noun)	Ø (ends in a consonant) -й -ь	-а (-я)
Masculine (adjective)	-ый/-ий -ой	-ого/-аго
Neuter (noun)	-о (-ё/-е)	-а (-я)
Neuter (adjective)	-ое	-ого
Feminine (noun)	-а (-я) -ь	-ы -и
Feminine (adjective)	-ая	-ой

JEWISH NAMES

Jews in the Russian Empire generally had three parts to their name: a given name, patronymic, and surname. Some individuals may have a double given name. See the charts below for common male and female given name handwritten examples.

A patronymic is a middle name derived from the given name of the person's father. These typically end in -ov (-ов) or -ovich (-ович) for males and -ova (-ова) or -ovna (-овна) for females. For more information about patronymics, see:


familysearch.org/en/wiki/Russian_Empire_Personal_Names#Patronymics.

A surname was passed through the male line and a woman adopted her husband's surname when she married. For more information on Jewish surnames as well as a list of Jewish surnames in the Russian Empire, see Alexander Beider's *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*.

Some handwritten examples of common Jewish given names can be found below. You may also wish to visit

jewishgen.org/ukraine/files/infosheets/L_Handwritten_Samples_of_Male_Given_Names.pdf or jewishgen.org/ukraine/files/infosheets/L_Handwritten_Samples_of_Female_Given_Names.pdf for additional names and examples.

Common Male Names and Examples

Abraham Abram Avraham	Абрам(ъ)	
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Aaron Aron Aharon	Арон(ъ)	Аронъ
Chaim	Хайм(ъ)	Хайимъ
David	Давид(ъ)	Давидъ
Gersh	Герш(ъ) Гершко	Гершъ
Isaac Yitzchak	Ицко Ицак(ъ)	Ицко
Joseph Josef Yoseph Yosef	Юсиф(ъ) Юсеф(ъ)	Юсифъ
Judah Juda Judka Yehuda	Юдка Юда	Юдка
Leib	Лайб(ъ)	Лайбъ
Leizer	Лейзор(ъ)	Лейзоръ
Meir Maier Mayer Meyer	Маер(ъ) МаѢр(ъ)	Маеръ
Mendel	Мендель	Мендель

Moses Moshe Moyshe Mosko Moszka	Мошко	Мошко,
Shmuel	Шмуйль Шмуель	Шмуель
Wolf Volf	Вульф(ъ) Вольф(ъ)	Вульф(ъ)
Yankel Jacob	Янкел(ъ) Янкѣл(ъ)	Янкѣл(ъ)

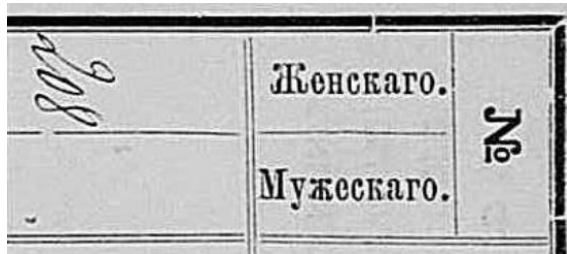
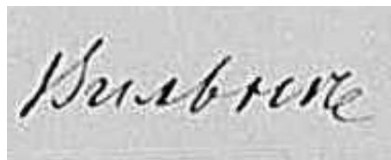
Common Female Names and Examples

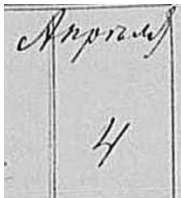
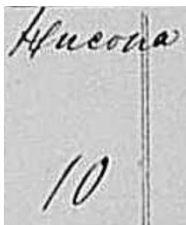
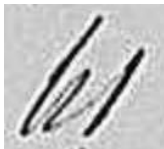
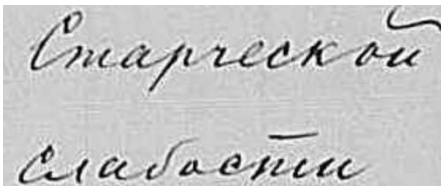
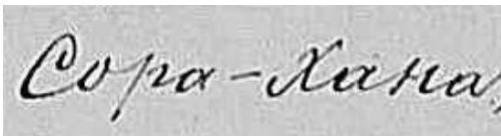
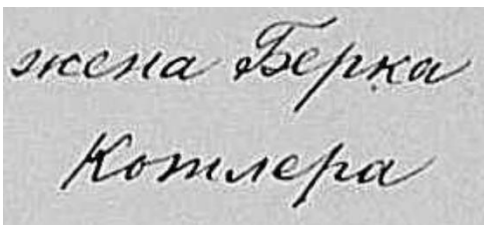

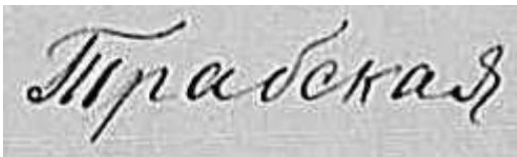
Chana Hannah	Хана	Хана
Chaya Haya	Хая	Хая
Deborah Devora Dworja	Двойра	Двойра
Esther Ester	Эстер(ъ)	Эстер(ъ)
Feiga Feyga Fegi Feyge	Файга	Файга

Gittel Gitel	Гитля	<i>Гитля</i>
Golda	Голда	<i>Голда</i>
Leah Laya Leigh	Лая	<i>Лая</i>
Rachel Rakhael Ruchla	Рохля Рухля	<i>Рухля</i> <i>Рухля</i>
Rebecca Rivka Riwka	Рывка Ривка Рифка	<i>Рывка</i>
Sarah Sara Sura	Сура Сара	<i>Сура</i>

PRACTICE

Now that we have learned about the key words, let's practice reading the record above by extracting the important genealogical details.

Was the individual a male or a female? How do you know?	Female, because the entry number was in the female column.	
Where did the individual die and where were they buried?	Вильнь Vilnius	

What was the date of death according to the Christian calendar?	4 April 1902	
What was the date of death according to the Hebrew calendar?	10 Nisan	
What was the age of the deceased individual?	61	
What was the cause of death?	Старческой слабости <i>Weakness relating to old age</i>	
What was the name of the deceased individual?	Сора – Хана <i>Sora Chana</i>	
Who was the deceased individual related to? How were they related to them?	жена Берка Котлера <i>wife of Berko Kotler</i>	
What was the social estate?	м. (abbreviation for мещанин) <i>Town dweller</i>	
What was the place of registration or residence?	Трабская (adjectival form of Трабы) <i>Traby</i>	

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! Click [here](#) to try out the Activity.

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